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RIPPER MOON

BY JACK RITCHIE

*Mr. Pomfret smiled amiably. "Doctor," he said.
"I get this mad compulsion to slash, slash, slash."*

I AM a lineal descendent of Jack the Ripper," Mr. Pomfret said.
"Really?"

He nodded. "Some families hand down secret recipes from generation to generation. In our case it is the knowledge that we have inherited the blood of that remarkable, and yet unknown, man."

Some of my patients choose to lie on the couch. Pomfret was one of them and now he lay with his hands folded happily over his small paunch.

He took a single sheet of paper

out of the breast pocket of his coat. "Would you like to see my family tree?"

I had expected something as complex as the lineage of the Jukes or the Kallikaks, but his ancestry was a tree without branches. A succession of only sons led back to a nineteenth century bookkeeper.

I studied Pomfret again. He had mild blue, slightly vacuous eyes and he was evidently at home in his recumbent position.

"Mr. Pomfret," I said. "Have you ever been analyzed before?"

He hesitated. "Well . . . yes."

"How many times?"

"Four."

"And why did you leave your previous psychiatrists?"

"When I felt I no longer needed them."

It was my suspicion that he had done so when he had caught them yawning, however I said, "But now you've come to me?"

"Well . . . after a while I find myself slipping again."

"Slipping? How?"

"I get this mad compulsion to slash, slash, slash." He turned his head toward me and smiled amiably. "Doctor, you must help me. You must."

The phone at my elbow rang and I picked it up.

It was Henry Wilkerson and his hysterical voice carried well into the room. "Doctor, I'm on the twelfth floor of the Tarleton Building and I'm going to jump!"

"Is that right," I said. "And why did you phone me?"

Perhaps he blinked and there was a momentary silence on the line. "Doctor, aren't you going to *try* to talk me out of it?"

"I never interfere with the free self-expression of any of my patients."

Another silence. "I said the *twelfth* floor. That's pretty high up."

"I understand your reluctance. Perhaps if you tried it from the eleventh?"

He seemed to be fighting tears.

"Doctor, you're *no* help at all." He hung up.

Pomfret had risen to a sitting position, his eyes round. "Just what kind of a psychiatrist are you anyway?"

"Cold-blooded and competent. Also I happen to know that the Tarleton Building is only eight stories high. He probably called from a phone booth at ground level." And further, though I did not tell Pomfret, I did not particularly care whether Wilkerson jumped to his death or not. "Mr. Pomfret," I said. "You may lie down again."

He did so with a trace of reluctance.

"Mr. Pomfret, are you married?"

"No."

"Living with a maiden aunt?"

"With my elder sister. She's a spinster."

I considered that answer close enough to have been a vindication of my guess. "Do you have any other hobbies?"

"Other hobbies?"

Besides having yourself psychoanalyzed, I had meant, but I rephrased the question. "Do you have any hobbies?"

"No. I used to smoke, but I gave that up after reading some articles."

I put his name on the top of a blank sheet of paper and clicked my ball point pen into readiness. "Tell me what comes to your mind."

He closed his eyes and relaxed. "Where should I begin?"

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"With my first impression. I was eighteen months old and got car sick. It was a 1924 Essex."

There was a certain narcotic element to Pomfret's voice and I found myself drifting into thought. When I returned some thirty minutes later, Pomfret was in the midst of reciting one of his most traumatic childhood experiences when he had stolen a pencil-sharpener from a dime-store counter.

I interrupted. "When do you get this mad impulse to slash, slash, slash?"

"On foggy nights. When the moon is full."

"If it is foggy, how do you know the moon is full?"

He blushed at the obstacle of logic. "I just *feel* that it's full."

"And *have* you ever slashed, slashed, slashed?"

"Well . . . no." He rallied. "But it is *truly* a wild, mad impulse. *Very* hard to resist."

I doubted whether Pomfret was capable of a wild, mad impulse. Without great danger of error, I thought I could slip Pomfret into a category. Man desires some distinction, real or imaginary, to lift him above the humdrum. In the case of Pomfret, he chose to regard himself as a descendent of Jack the Ripper and capable of similar actions. "Mr. Pomfret," I said. "How do you *know* you are a descendent of the real Jack the Ripper?"

He smiled complacently. "The diary. It's been passed down from

father to son for almost a hundred years."

I glanced at my watch. "Our time is up for today. I'd like to see you again on Wednesday morning at ten." At the door a thought came to me. "The next time you come here, would you bring the diary with you?"

After dinner that evening, I watched my wife, Laurette, at the dressing table mirror.

She glanced at my reflection. "I hope you haven't forgotten that we go to the Carsons tonight? Which earrings shall I wear? The white or the green?"

"The green."

She held the white pair up to her ears. "I'll wear the white."

"Why did you ask me? The green."

She turned and glared. "White." "Green."

Laurette is one of two daughters whose father possessed the sum of two million dollars. Her will is of iron. Mine is of steel.

"You are being childish," Laurette said. "White."

"We are both being childish, but I remain adamant. The green."

Though the youngest child, she had dominated her father and her sister, Melanie. Originally I thought that perhaps the arrangement suited them all—her father and her sister seemed to need direction—but subsequently I had reason to doubt it.

When her father died, he left his entire estate—with the exception of

a paltry ten thousand a year—to Melanie.

It was a turn of events which shook me considerably.

Perhaps he did so because he thought I had courted Laurette for her money—which was true—or possibly it was a species of revenge upon Laurette for the domination he resented. Whatever the actual motive, the one he declared in his will was that he considered my income as a psychiatrist sufficient for me to support Laurette properly.

I had thought of resorting to the courts to break the will, but I soon discovered the hopelessness of such an action. Her father had slyly had himself certified sane and in full possession of all his faculties by three psychiatrists before making out the will.

Laurette picked up the green earrings and began fastening them. "How in the world did you ever get to become a psychiatrist?"

"My parents could afford it."

She surveyed her image for a final inspection. "If you had a lot of money—and I mean a *lot*—how would that change your life?"

"I would lock the door of my office and never return."

She slipped into her wrap. "We'll take a taxi."

"Our car."

"Taxi."

We took our automobile and arrived at the Carsons at approximately eight-thirty.

Eventually I found myself next

to one of the other guests, Dr. Nevins.

He spoke enthusiastically. "Just wound up a conversion hysteric case. The man had absolutely no musical talent, but his mother hot-house forced him to practice the piano and even made a concert pianist out of him. On his twenty-first birthday he declared his independence by developing paralysis of the hands."

I yawned. "How's your golf game been lately?"

"I don't play golf. Anyway, his mother finally died and at the graveside his paralysis left him. Well-adjusted now. Got himself a job as a used-car salesman."

A young man—the kind who carries a cocktail glass from conversation to conversation—drifted toward us. "You're both doctors, aren't you?"

We acknowledged that and waited for his symptoms.

He tilted his head. "People become doctors for a number of reasons—for the prestige, for the money, because they like medicine, or . . ." He smiled cunningly. "Or because they have a burning desire to help humanity." He pointed a finger at Nevins. "Why did *you* become a doctor?"

Nevins made a confident choice. "Because I *like* medicine."

The young man shook his head sadly. "Don't you think there's something *wrong* with anybody who *likes* sick people? Who *likes* diseases?" He wandered away.

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Nevins turned to me, mildly troubled. "Why did *you* become a doctor?"

"Because I have a burning desire to help humanity."

Laurette's sister, Melanie, arrived at the party at nine. We exchanged glances, but said nothing.

Once during the evening she touched my hand lightly.

I smiled and spoke softly. "Careful. Someone may see us."

At eleven-thirty, I approached Laurette. "Time to go home."

She frowned. "I do not *feel* like going now."

"I do."

We locked eyes. Then she turned to her hostess, shrugged apologetically, and slipped into the wrap I held.

On Wednesday, Pomfret arrived at my office promptly at ten.

He extended a large green volume. "Actually this is only one of a series of twelve, but the accounts of the murders are all in here."

I regarded the large diary dubiously.

"I have book marks in the pertinent places," Pomfret said quickly. "You don't have to read the whole thing."

I sat down with the book. When I finished the indicated passages, I thumbed through the rest of the diary.

Hiram Pomfret—for such was the Ripper's full name—had been single and living with his spinster sister. He had been a bookkeeper with the

East India House. The over-whelming majority of the volume chronicled such events as the time he rose in the mornings, when he retired, what he ate, and the state of his liver.

I lit a cigarette. Each of his murders—if indeed the diary were genuine and he had not lied—had been immediately preceded by a violent quarrel with his sister. As a matter of fact he devoted more words to the quarrels than he did to the murders.

And when his sister died, presumably of natural causes—the compulsion to murder had suddenly left him.

I turned the book over in my hands several times. "Could you leave this here? I'd like to study it a little further."

After a moment's hesitation, he agreed. "But you won't show it to anybody else?"

"No." I stared at my cigarette smoke for a while. "When you get these impulses, what do you do?"

"Do?"

"Yes. Do you just lie down and wait until they go away? Or what?"

"I go for a walk."

"Just for a walk? That's all?"

"Well . . . I sort of think . . . dream, I guess . . . that I'm Jack the Ripper . . . looking . . . stalking . . ."

"But you *do* nothing?"

He seemed almost ashamed. "No."

I heard the outer door of my waiting room open and shut. My next client had arrived. "Mr. Pomfret,"

I said. "I would like to see you again tomorrow."

At twelve o'clock, I locked up my office and met Melanie at Paretti's for lunch.

There is only a slight family resemblance between her and my wife, Laurette. Melanie is smaller, has sloping, rather than square, shoulders, and gray cat eyes.

We kissed and then she said, "Just one year more, dear, and then the divorce."

I sighed. "Plus that one year waiting period."

She patted my hand. "The waiting period is absolutely necessary. We'll need it so that it will appear that you fell in love with me *after* the divorce—not that you divorced Laurette because you fell in love with me."

"I know, but . . ."

"We must avoid any talk that might injure your reputation. After all, dear, when we establish your clinic, magazine articles will be written about you and we don't want any raised eyebrows."

But still two years away from Melanie's millions was a frustratingly long time. Anything could happen. "Couldn't I get the divorce right now? That would save us a year."

"You must be married to one wife at least three years. This establishes the fact that you are mature, but eventually had to bow to incompatibility. People insist on mature psychiatrists." She smiled smugly.

"None of my friends are married to psychiatrists."

"They are quite rare."

"I want a husband who *is* something," Melanie said firmly. "Not just a man."

Over coffee, she again returned to a point which seemed to plague her. "I just can't understand why you married Laurette rather than me."

I manufactured my usual smile. "I met Laurette first, and besides, I didn't think you were interested in me. After all, you said nothing."

She admitted that. "I thought there was plenty of time. But everything moved so fast. You were never even formally engaged to her. Suddenly you were married."

Yes, everything had moved swiftly. But that had been my doing. I had seen the million dollars behind Laurette's shoulder and that had impelled me to avoid a long perilous engagement. One had to act quickly before the prize wandered.

Melanie exhaled sadly. "Two years. It's going to be so long, but I can't think of any quicker and proper way to get rid of Laurette now."

I said nothing.

When Melanie and I parted, I went to the public library, selected the most comprehensive volume on Jack the Ripper and proceeded to read.

His crimes, and the accounting of them in Hiram Pomfret's diary matched perfectly. There was just

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one difficulty. The dates were not the same. Hiram chronicled the murders a week, sometimes two, after they actually occurred.

It was just as I had expected. Hiram had merely read about the murders in the newspapers of his time and had appropriated them for his dream world. It was even possible that eventually he actually believed that he *was* Jack the Ripper—such an assimilation is not too rare—but the fact remained that Hiram Pomfret and Jack the Ripper were two different persons.

I remained in the silence of the library for half an hour more and then made up my mind. One must make do with what one has.

I left the library, drove to a hardware store, and bought a long thin knife.

The next day I cancelled all my appointments—with the exception of Pomfert's. While I waited for him, I dissolved a dozen sleeping tablets in a partly full decanter of cold water and stirred thoroughly. Then I hung a calendar under my medical certificate.

When Pomfert arrived, I studied him more carefully. Was my patient as simple and placid as he appeared? Or did he suffer the hot frustrations of life? Was he capable of hatred? Violent rage? Was the seed of murder within him? I handed back the diary. "This seems to be authentic."

"Then you really *do* believe that I am the direct descendent of Jack the Ripper, don't you?"

"It is difficult not to." I allowed a thoughtful interval of silence and then said, "When you prowl about on these moonlit foggy nights—do you carry a knife?"

"No."

"And yet sometimes you wish that you did?"

"Well . . ."

I opened my desk drawer and took out the knife I had purchased the day before. I extended it, handle forward. "Take this."

He recoiled. "Why?"

"I merely want to study your reactions when you hold it."

He took the weapon gingerly. "Are you sure this is healthy?"

"You may trust me." I made a pretense of looking him over critically. "Now slash at someone imaginary in front of you."

He did so, clumsily and tentatively.

"Slash upward," I directed. "From nape to chaps. Imagine someone you hate stands leering before you. Your employer. A neighbor. A blood relative."

He slashed again, with more enthusiasm.

"Again," I said. "Again. With feeling." I had him repeat the action some thirty times. "That will be enough for now," I said finally.

He stopped with a trace of reluctance. "Sort of gets you after a while. How were my reactions?"

I managed to look troubled. "Your eyes."

"My eyes?"

"Yes. At about the tenth slash, suddenly a steely determination seemed to leap into them."

"Steely determination?" He looked about, probably for a mirror.

"And the *way* you slashed," I said with awe. "It seemed as though . . . as though. . . ."

He leaned forward. "Yes? Yes?" I pulled myself together, took the knife out of his hand, and put it back in the desk drawer. I poured a glass of water. "Drink this. You look somewhat warm."

He took the glass and dutifully emptied it.

I picked up my pad and a pen. "We'll get on with the session. Lie down on the couch, Mr. Pomfret." I waited until he did so. "Now let me see, the last time you were in that position you were telling me about the pencil sharpener."

"Oh, that," he said deprecatingly. "I'd rather talk about Jack the Ripper."

I doodled idly on my pad. "Tell me what comes to your mind."

He rambled on and after a bit his speech slowed and he yawned. In another five minutes he was asleep and snoring softly.

I could not, of course, estimate to the minute how long he would sleep. I would have preferred that he do so for less than a half hour, however giving him too small a dose might have induced nothing more than drowsiness.

I got several magazines from my waiting room and sat down to wait.

After an hour Pomfret was still asleep, but I thought the time had come to bring him out of it. I rapped a book sharply three times on my desk.

His eyes opened, closed, and then quickly opened again. He sat up and blushed. "I guess I must have fallen asleep."

I dragged sharply on my cigarette. "No, Mr. Pomfret. It wasn't sleep. Not sleep."

He glanced at his watch. "But I've been on the couch for about an hour and I don't remember. . . ."

"It wasn't sleep," I said again. "Not sleep. Something *happened!* Suddenly it wasn't *you* talking."

He blinked. "It wasn't?"

I rubbed my eyes as though they were tired. "Mr. Pomfret, were you born in England?"

"No. Peoria."

"Strange," I murmured. "And yet . . . and yet you spoke with an English accent. A definite English accent." I took a couple of obviously troubled breaths. "Mr. Pomfret, you were in a *trance*."

"I was?"

I lit a cigarette from the stub of the previous one. "I've never . . . *never* believed in reincarnation until. . . ."

He leaned forward hopefully. "Until?"

I rose and began pacing. "I *still* don't believe it. It's impossible."

He rose to the defense of his reincarnation. "Why is it impossible?"

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couldn't possibly be Jack the. . . ." I rubbed my eyes again. "You are only a miserable bookkeeper."

He flushed. "*Jack* was just a miserable bookkeeper."

"But just look at you. Physically you are absolutely insignificant."

The flush deepened. "It just so happens that Jack was exactly the same weight and height that I am. He describes himself on page one, volume one, of the dairies."

"He was dominated by his sister."

"And I am dominated by my . . ."

He stopped and cleared his throat. "I mean I just don't see why it's impossible that I could actually be a reincarnation of Jack the Ripper."

I resumed pacing and spoke aloud, but as to myself. "Fulfillment. That's who you . . . *he* said. Every man must seek fulfillment. He must prove, if only to himself, that he is not the insignificant creature that *everyone* thinks he is."

Pomfret nodded in agreement.

"And you . . . *Jack* said that at the next full. . . ." I stopped speaking abruptly and strode to the calendar on the wall. "We've got only a week until. . . ."

Pomfret joined me at the calendar.

"Until the next full moon?"

I stared at him soberly. "Jack . . . I mean, Pomfret . . . I want to see you every day during the remainder of this week and the next. We've got to stop this from happening."

But, of course, quashing the reincarnation was the last thing I had in mind.

RIPPER MOON

I cancelled all my other appointments and concentrated upon Pomfret—mornings, afternoons, and evenings.

The volunteer patient has a pathetically eager desire to win the approval of his psychiatrist. If his doctor frowns, he is shattered; if he smiles, he is delighted. During the next few days I ostensibly set upon a course of "curing" Pomfret of the obsession which he barely, if at all, had.

I kept emphasizing that he could not murder because he was mentally, emotionally, and physically incapable of such a positive action. In short, he lacked the courage. I also made it plain that basically, though I was fighting hard to conceal it, I absolutely detested people who lacked courage. Especially Pomfret.

That approach proved only partially successful, for while Pomfret had his narcissistic foible—his desire for continual psychoanalysis—it still remained that otherwise he was remarkably adjusted to his actual situation in life. That he was insignificant physically, that he was not particularly intelligent, that he dwelt under the thumb of his elder sister, these things he accepted with a minimum of resentment.

Even his belief that he was a direct descendent of Jack the Ripper was not a revolt from reality, not a relapse into a warm dream world. It was a "fact." His father had told him it was true and he had himself seen it in black and white.

Pomfret was therefore, a difficult problem for me, and now I concentrated on his relations with his sister and continually directed the analysis back to that point.

I revived the petty squabbles they'd had. I analyzed them viciously. I tore them apart and cemented them back together, but in distorted and giant proportion. I created trauma over a scolding for a broken dish, a mud track on the floor, tardiness for a meal.

And yet Pomfret loved his sister. This too was a fact that I could not destroy and did not wish to. I wanted him to hate and love. To love, to hate, to feel guilt for hating, and yet to feel *justified*. To feel rage, yet a helplessness to act.

But how does one purge one's self of consuming hatred and rage? How does one prove that one is really a man?

Now I channeled the hate I had created. It was not really his sister who was nagging, who stifled his manhood. It was *all* women.

And that was the light—the *relief*—for Pomfret. He couldn't possibly harm his sister—not someone he actually loved—but. . . .

And I . . . his psychiatrist . . . *God* . . . subtly intimated that I might even approve.

Except for his "trances," I doubt that Pomfret slept much at all during the week. At the end of six days he had lost weight, was hollow-eyed, but frantically impatient for the advent of the full moon.

On the seventh day, he left my office perspiring and on the brink of action.

I had done as much as I could and nothing remained now but to wait. I spent the evening at home in my study listening to news broadcasts.

I had almost given up on Pomfret, for that night, at least, when the announcement came over the eleven-thirty news. A woman had been slashed to death on the west side. The murder appeared motiveless, but the method immediately led the commentator to make comparisons with Jack the Ripper.

I made myself a drink. Pomfret had come through.

The next morning I looked up Pomfret's address, drove to the neighborhood and cruised about. It was an old-fashioned section of the city with heavy shade trees and little known street names. The corner of Montmorency and Dill seemed an appropriately untraveled and potentially dark site. I made a note of the location and then drove to my office.

Pomfret arrived at ten. He seemed different now. More relaxed, the possessor of a certain new confidence. He smiled slightly. "Is it true that a psychiatrist is like a priest? When you tell him something he's not allowed to repeat it to anyone? Not even the police?"

"We do keep confidences," I said. "However not to that extent." I laughed lightly. "If someone told me that he had just committed a murder, for instance, I'd be obliged

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He seemed disappointed. He tried a side gambit. "Did you read the morning paper?"

"No." I poured a glass of water and pushed it toward him. "You look tired and thirsty."

He took the glass. "I seem to be drinking an awful lot of water here." He finished the glass and lay down on the couch. "Do you suppose I'll fall into a trance again? It's been pretty regular."

"We shall see."

He appeared suddenly worried. "Suppose I say something in my trance about murdering somebody. Recently. Would you go to the police?"

"Of course not," I reassured him. "Words spoken in a trance are not admissible as evidence in a court. Against the Fourth and Fifth Amendments."

When he woke an hour later, he quickly asked, "Did I say anything about a murder?"

"No."

He scratched his head. "I dreamed . . . I mean I *thought* I said something about last night."

"No." I looked puzzled. "But you did say a few other things. Really nothing much, except that you kept repeating, 'The moon is still full tonight.'"

His eyes went toward the calendar. "It is?"

"Yes. And you kept repeating two names. One of them was Montmor-

ency. Does that mean anything to you? A town? A person? A tart red cherry?"

He gave it thought.

"The other name was Dill," I said. "Montmorency and Dill."

A light dawned in his eyes.

"And you kept saying, 'It is destiny. It is destiny.'"

He nodded sagely. "Destiny is a pretty important thing." He smiled to himself and repeated the message. "*The moon is still full tonight. Montmorency and Dill. It is destiny.*" He frowned. "Did I mention anything else? Like a time?"

"I forgot," I said hastily. "You did mumble something about eleven in the evening."

When he left the office, he looked at me and spoke slyly. "Be sure to read tomorrow morning's paper. A fellow really ought to keep up with the news."

In the evening, Laurette and I got into our car for the drive to the party the Newmans were giving.

"Are you taking the 27th or the 35th Street viaduct?" she asked.

"The 27th."

"I prefer the 35th."

"All right. We'll take the 35th."

She looked at me. "Aren't you feeling well?"

"I simply do not feel inclined to argue tonight."

Sometime during that evening, at about ten-thirty, I would disappear for a moment, and when I returned I would draw Laurette aside. "I just had a phone call. Or rather it was

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actually for you, but the maid misunderstood and got me."

"What was it?"

"Betty Nelson. She phoned our apartment and Clara told her we'd be here."

"I thought Betty was in Europe."

"Evidently she returned. She seemed quite agitated."

"What was wrong?"

"She wouldn't tell me. But she said that she wanted to see you immediately. Alone. I wasn't to come with you. At the corner of Montmorency and Dill. She said it was terribly important."

Laurette would frown. "She didn't give any hint as to what it's all about?"

"No. But she said for you to hurry. She would be there at eleven."

And since Betty was her best friend, Laurette would take our car and go.

What would I do about Pomfret after tonight?

I thought I could handle that. A few more of his trances and I would convince him that Jack the Ripper was satiated for this generation, at least.

Now I turned the car onto the 35th Street viaduct.

"Let me feel your forehead," Laurette asked.

"I am *perfectly* all right."

Laurette was silent until we left the viaduct. "Most people think I'm a strong personality, but actually I've never won an argument with you until now."

"Congratulations."

"I mean that most people think that I dominated my sister and my father. Actually that wasn't true. My manner was simply a sort of self-defense to prevent being subjugated. Melanie was the dominant member of the family."

I had suspected that ever since I've begun seeing Melanie. Naturally I had had to bend my own personality to some extent in order to create a favorable impression with her, but I had the uneasy suspicion that after our marriage I might have difficulty preserving my intellectual and emotional independence. Melanie was not obviously forceful, but she had the patience and wearing power of a leech. Laurette was much easier to deal with.

"Tell me," Laurette said. "If you had it to do all over again—and knew who was getting the money—whom would you marry, Melanie or me?"

"It seems to be getting foggy tonight."

Laurette smiled slightly. "Then let me put it this way. If both of us had the same amount of money, just whom would you choose?"

I spoke without hesitation. "You, of course."

Laurette was quietly thoughtful the rest of the trip and when I parked near the Newman residence, she touched my arm. "Money means an awful lot to you, doesn't it?"

"Of course."

"And frankly, it means a lot to

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me too. Much more than you might
think. As a matter of fact, I've
thought of killing Melanie."

I helped Laurette out of the car.
"What good would that do?"

"Quite a bit. I happen to know
that Melanie hasn't made out a will.
If she died now, the entire estate
would go to me."

At ten-thirty, I went upstairs to
one of the Newman bedrooms and
used the phone. "Melanie," I said.

["I must see you right away. I can't

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explain why now, but it's dreadfully
important. It means our entire fu-
ture."

"All right, dear," she said. "Where
shall I meet you?"

"Montmorency and Dill. I happen
to be attending a party in the neigh-
borhood and I can slip out for a
moment."

At eleven o'clock I looked across
the room at Laurette and silently
toasted two million dollars and
Pomfret the Ripper.

